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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Wal-Mart debate rages

FIRST SHOPPING EXPERIENCE MAKES A FAN OF ONE READER

OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS, I have watched with great interest the efforts by Wal-Mart to enter the New York City market (*Crain's* editorial, "A tale of two retailers," Aug. 17). As a lifelong city resident, I had actually never been to a Wal-Mart and could not quite understand the vehemence of its opponents, who charged that the retailer lacked health benefits, paid substandard wages and hurt local mom-and-pop retailers.

Last week, while in Burlington, Vt., I happened to drive by a Wal-Mart and decided to stop in and see what the controversy was about. For those of us accustomed to shopping in the city, entering your first Wal-Mart is an awe-inspiring experience. The breadth of the products they carry is astounding, and the prices are shockingly low.

More important, what I noticed was the large number of employees proudly wearing badges proclaiming their length of employment with the company. Many had

been employed for 10 to 15 years. As I was going through the checkout line, I asked the woman at the cash register how she liked working for Wal-Mart. She responded enthusiastically that she had been working for the company for over 15 years and could not imagine a better employer.

What I realized after this conversation is that the debate about Wal-Mart being a "bad" employer was not really about how they treated their employees but was an

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issue about protecting labor unions against the competition of a strong nonunion employer.

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